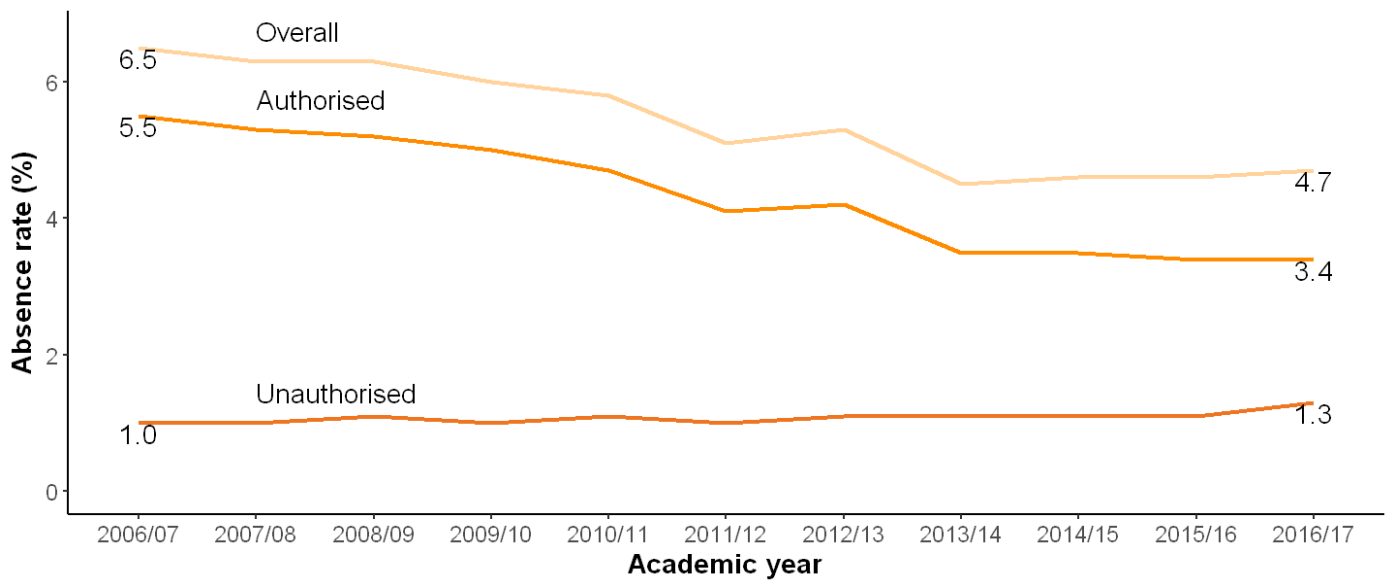




Pupil absence in schools in England: 2016 to 2017

SFR 18/2018, 22 March 2018

Overall and unauthorised absence rates have increased since last year

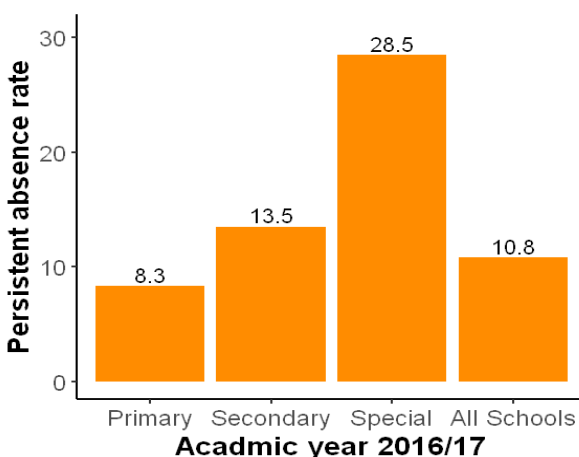


The overall absence rate has increased from 4.6 per cent in 2015/16 to 4.7 per cent in 2016/17. The authorised absence rate stayed the same at 3.4 per cent and the unauthorised absence rate increased from 1.1 per cent in 2015/16 to 1.3 per cent in 2016/17.

The rise in unauthorised absence rates is due to higher rates of unauthorised holidays

The unauthorised absence rate increased from 1.1 per cent in 2015/16 to 1.3 per cent in 2016/17, due to higher levels of unauthorised holidays. Authorised absence rates are similar to the previous year.

One in ten pupils was persistently absent during the academic year 2016/17



The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools that were classified as persistent absentees in 2016/17 was 10.8 per cent, an increase from 10.5 per cent in 2015/16.

Persistent absence rates are highest in special schools.

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About this release

This statistical first release (SFR) reports on absence of pupils of compulsory school age in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools during the 2016/17 academic year. Information on absence in pupil referral units, and for pupils aged four, is also included. The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence – overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason and pupils characteristics is also included in this release. Figures are available at national, regional, local authority and school level. Figures held in this release are used for policy development as key indicators in behaviour and school attendance policy. Schools and local authorities also use the statistics to compare their local absence rates to regional and national averages for different pupil groups.

A "[guide to absence statistics](#)", which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release.

In this publication

The following tables are included in the SFR:

- SFR18_2017_National_tables.xls and .ods
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt)

This includes local authority level information and is accompanied by a metadata document that describes underlying data files.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at schools.statistics@education.gov.uk.

1. Absence rates

Overall absence rate definition

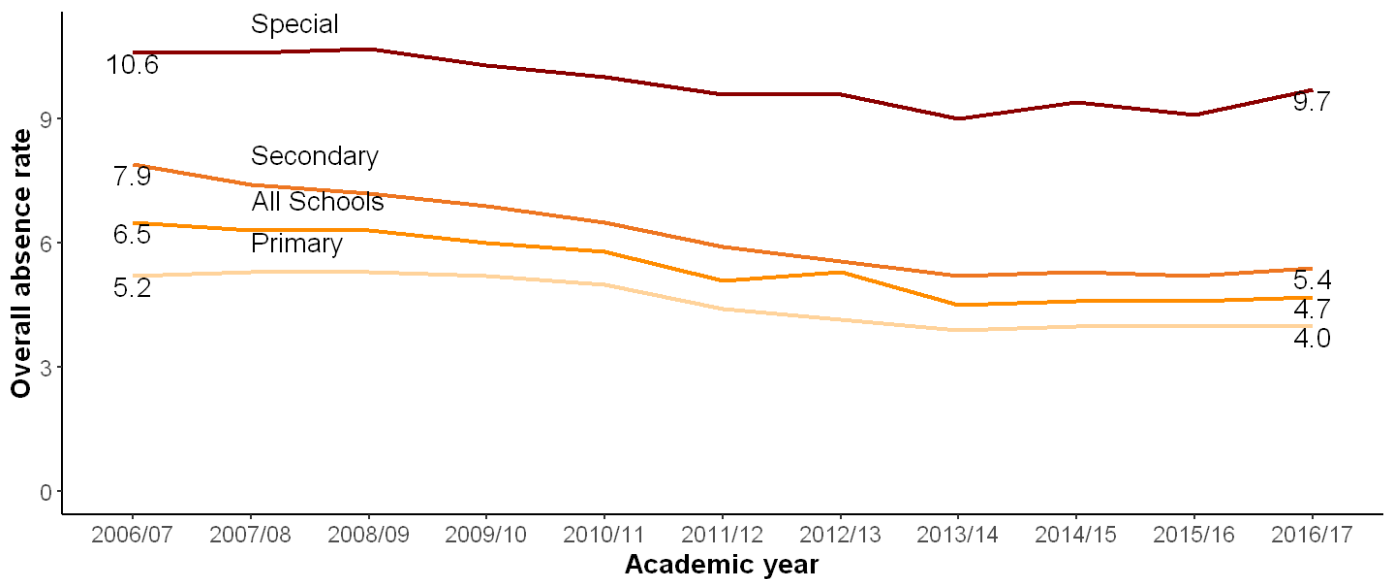
The overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions for all pupils as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions for all pupils, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools increased from 4.6 per cent in 2015/16 to 4.7 per cent in 2016/17. In primary schools the overall absence rate stayed the same at 4 per cent and the rate in secondary schools increased from 5.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent. Absence in special schools is much higher at 9.7 per cent in 2016/17

Figure 1: Comparison of the trend in overall absence rates

England, 2006/07 to 2016/17



The increase in overall absence rate has been driven by an increase in the unauthorised absence rate across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools - which increased from 1.1 per cent to 1.3 per cent between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Looking at longer-term trends, overall and authorised absence rates have been fairly stable over recent years after decreasing gradually between 2006/07 and 2013/14. Unauthorised absence rates have not varied much since 2006/07, however the unauthorised absence rate is now at its highest since records began, at 1.3 per cent.

This increase in unauthorised absence is due to an increase in absence due to family holidays that were not agreed by the school. The authorised absence rate has not changed since last year, at 3.4 per cent. Though in primary schools authorised absence rates have been decreasing across recent years.

The total number of days missed due to overall absence across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools has increased since last year, from 54.8 million in 2015/16 to 56.7 million in 2016/17. This partly reflects the rise in the total number of pupil enrolments, the average number of days missed per enrolment has increased very slightly from 8.1 days in 2015/16 to 8.2 days in 2016/17.

In 2016/17, 91.8 per cent of pupils in state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and special schools missed at least one session during the school year, this is similar to the previous year (91.7 per cent in 2015/16).

2. Persistent absence

Persistent absence definition

A pupil enrolment is identified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

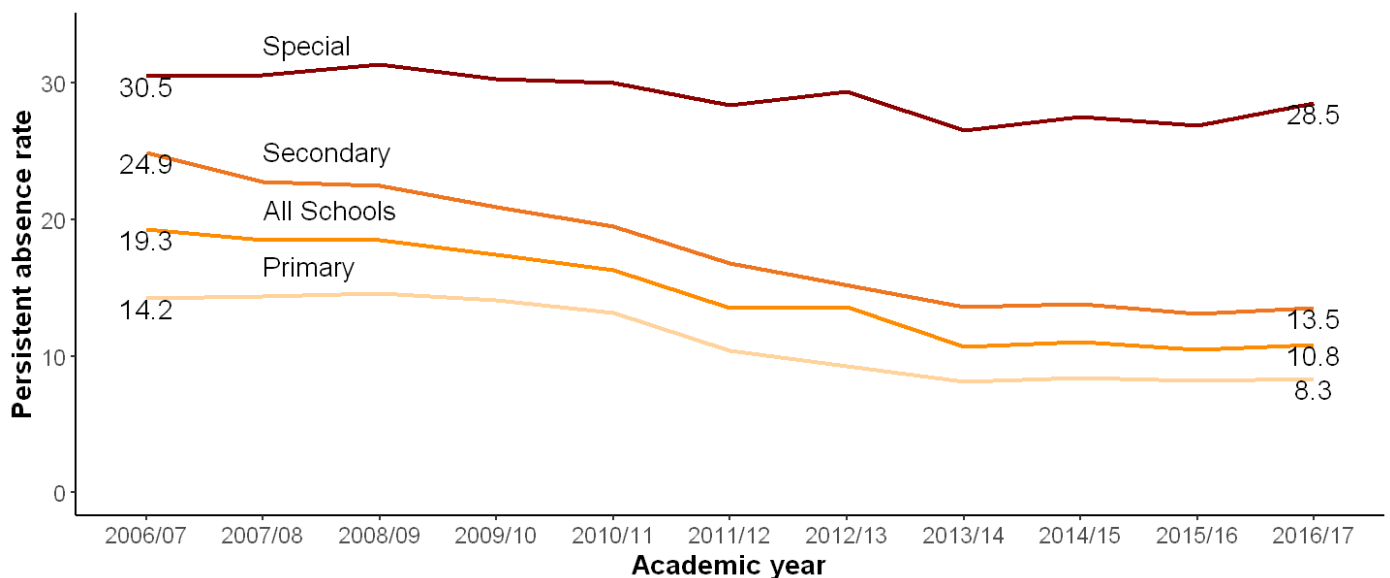
$$\text{Persistent absence rate} = \frac{\text{Number of enrolments classed as persistent absentees}}{\text{Number of enrolments}} \times 100$$

The persistent absentee measure changed as of the start of the 2015/16 academic year. Time series data in this release has been recalculated using the new methodology but caution should be used when interpreting these series as they may be impacted by the change in the measure itself. For more information on this and on the methodologies used in previous years, please see the ["guide to absence statistics"](#).

The percentage of enrolments in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools that were classified as persistent absentees in 2016/17 was 10.8 per cent. This is up from the equivalent figure of 10.5 per cent in 2015/16 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of enrolments who are persistent absentees

England, 2006/07 to 2016/17



In 2016/17, persistent absentees accounted for 37.6 per cent of all absence compared to 36.6 per cent in 2015/16. Longer term, there has been a decrease in the proportion of absence that persistent absentees account for – down from 43.3 per cent in 2011/12.

The overall absence rate for persistent absentees across all schools was 18.1 per cent, nearly four times higher than the rate for all pupils. This is a slight increase from 2015/16, when the overall absence rate for persistent absentees was 17.6 per cent.

Persistent absentees account for almost a third, 31.6 per cent, of all authorised absence and more than half, 53.8 per cent of all unauthorised absence. The rate of illness absences is almost four times higher for persistent absentees compared to other pupils, at 7.6 per cent and 2.0 per cent respectively.

3. Reasons for absence

Within this release absence by reason is broken down in three different ways:

Distribution of absence by reason: The proportion of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of absences.

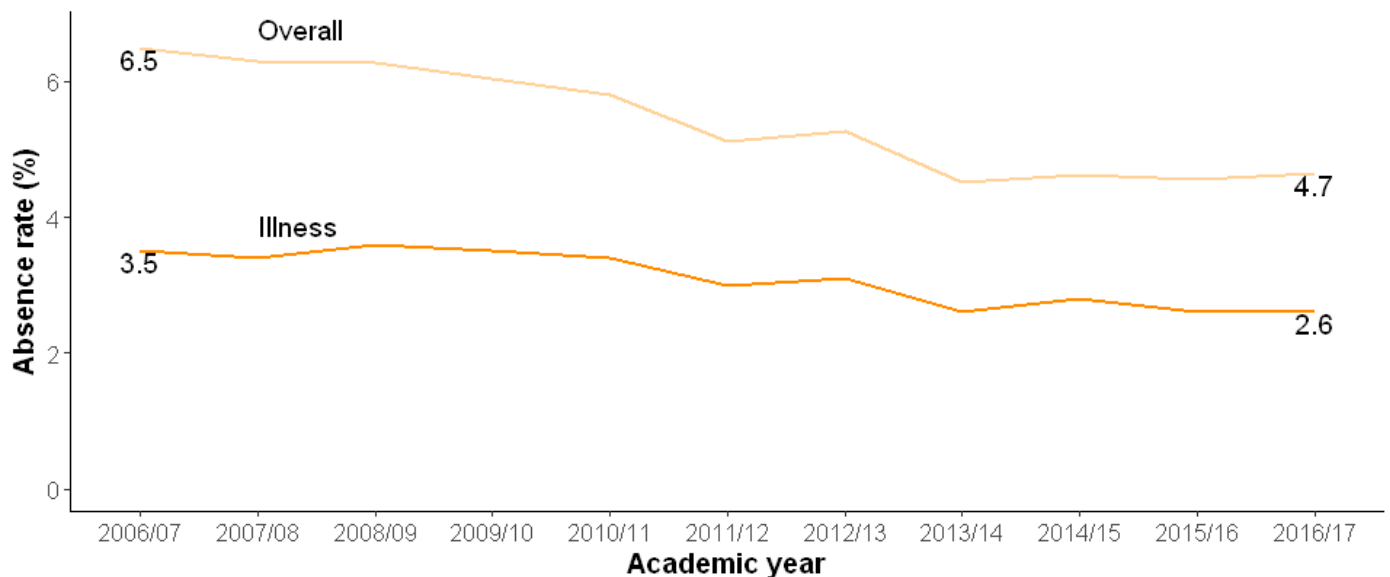
Rate of absence by reason: The rate of absence for each reason, calculated by taking the number of absences for a specific reason as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions.

One or more sessions missed due to each reason: The number of pupil enrolments missing at least one session due to each reason.

Illness is the main driver for overall absence rates, however whilst overall absence rates have increased slightly since 2015/16, illness rates have remained the same at 2.6 per cent. Illness absence accounted for 55.3 per cent of all absence in 2016/17, a lower proportion than seen in previous years - 57.3 in 2015/16 and 60.1 in 2014/15.

Figure 3: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates

England, 2006/07 to 2016/17



The rate of absence due to other unauthorised circumstances has remained the same as in 2015/16 at 0.7 per cent.

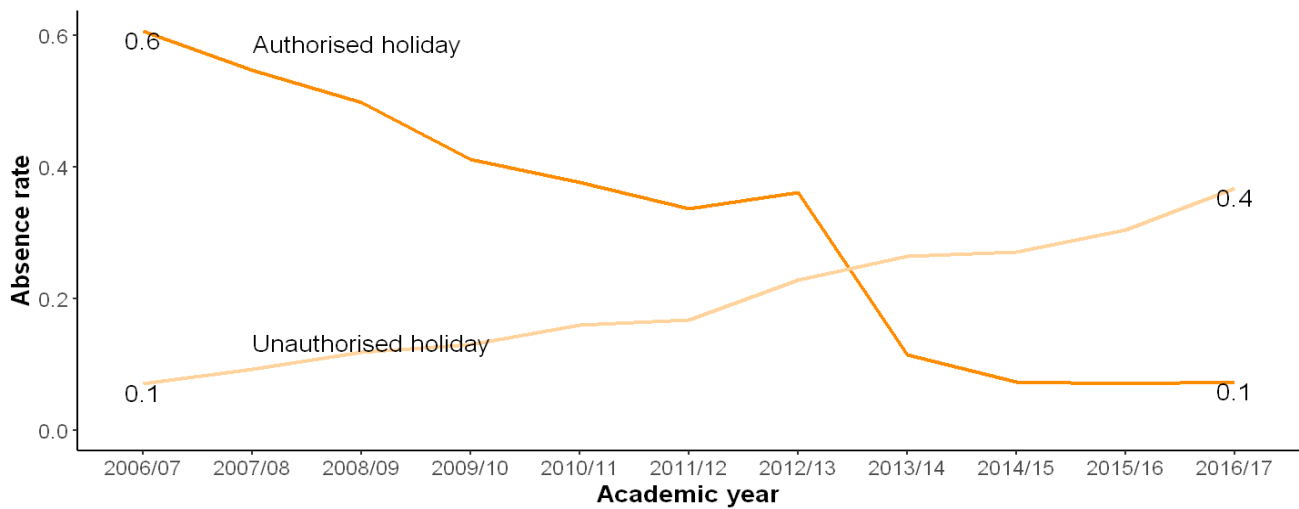
Absence due to family holiday

The percentage of pupils who missed at least one session due to a family holiday in 2016/17 was 16.9 per cent, compared with 14.7 per cent in 2015/16.

The absence rate due to family holidays agreed by the school was 0.1 in 2016/17, which was the same as in 2015/16. The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to unauthorised family holidays increased from 0.3 per cent in 2015/16 to 0.4 in 2016/17.

Unauthorised holiday absence rates have been increasing gradually since 2006/07, authorised holiday absence rates are much lower now than in 2006/07 but have remained steady over recent years. From September 2013 a regulations amendment stated that term time leave may only be granted in exceptional circumstances, which explains the sharp fall in authorised holiday absence between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Figure 4: Comparison of the trend in authorised and unauthorised family holiday absence rates England, 2006/07 to 2016/17



Note – This chart is based on unrounded absence rates

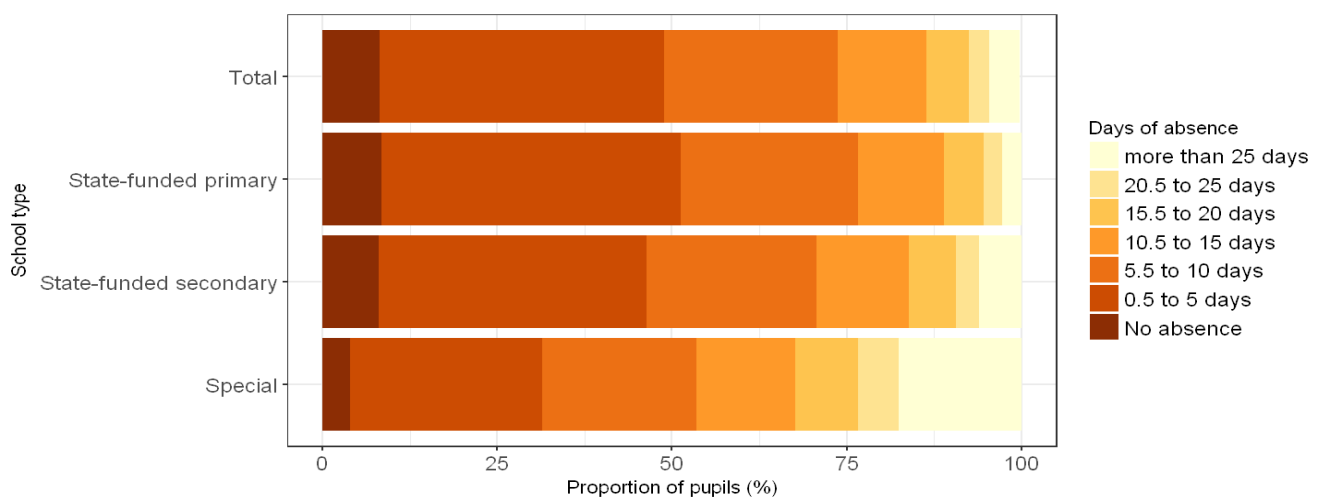
The figures in this publication relate to the period after the Isle of Wight Council v Jon Platt High Court judgment (which was in May 2016) where the High Court supported a local magistrates’ ruling that there was no case to answer and partially to the period after the judgment in the Supreme Court (which was in April 2017) where the Supreme Court unanimously agreed that no children should be taken out of school without good reason and clarified that ‘regularly’ means ‘in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school’.

4. Distribution of absence

Nearly half of all pupils (48.9 per cent) were absent for five days or fewer across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in 2016/17, down from 49.1 per cent in 2015/16.

4.3 per cent of pupil enrolments had more than 25 days of absence in 2016/17 (the same as in 2015/16). These pupil enrolments accounted for 23.5 per cent of days missed. 8.2 per cent of pupil enrolments had no absence during 2016/17.

Figure 5: Distribution of total days missed due to overall absence per pupil enrolment England, 2006/07 to 2016/17



Per pupil enrolment, the average total absence in primary schools was 7.2 days, compared to 16.9 days in special schools and 9.3 days in secondary schools.

When looking at absence rates across terms for primary, secondary and special schools, the overall absence rate is lowest in the autumn term and highest in the summer term. The authorised rate is highest in the spring term and lowest in the summer term, and the unauthorised rate is highest in the summer term.

Table 6: Absence rates by term

England, State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, 2016/17

	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Total
Overall	4.4	4.7	4.9	4.7
Authorised	3.4	3.6	3.2	3.4
Unauthorised	1.1	1.1	1.7	1.3

5. Absence by pupil characteristics

The patterns of absence rates for pupils with different characteristics have been consistent across recent years.

Gender

The overall absence rates across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools were very similar for boys and girls, at 4.7 per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively. The persistent absence rates were also similar, at 10.9 per cent for boys and 10.6 per cent for girls.

Free school meals (FSM) eligibility

Absence rates are higher for pupils who are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals. The overall absence rate for these pupils was 7.3 per cent, compared to 4.2 per cent for non FSM pupils. The persistent absence rate for pupils who were eligible for FSM was more than twice the rate for those pupils not eligible for FSM.

National curriculum year group

Pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 had the lowest overall absence rates at 3.9 and 4 per cent respectively. Pupils in national curriculum year groups 10 and 11 had the highest overall absence rate at 6.1 per cent and 6.2 per cent respectively. This trend is repeated for persistent absence.

Special educational need (SEN)

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education healthcare plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 8.2 per cent compared to 4.3 per cent for those with no identified SEN. The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan that are persistent absentees was more than two times higher than the percentage for pupils with no identified SEN.

Ethnic group

The highest overall absence rates were for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils at 18.1 per cent and 12.9 per cent respectively. Overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and Black African ethnicity were substantially lower than the national average of 4.7 per cent at 2.4 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively. A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates; Traveller of Irish heritage pupils had the highest rate at 64 per cent and Chinese pupils had the lowest rate at 3.1 per cent.

6. Absence for four year olds

The overall absence rate for four year olds in 2016/17 was 5.1 per cent which is lower than the rate of 5.2 per cent which it has been for the last two years.

Absence recorded for four year olds is not treated as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' and is therefore reported as overall absence only.

7. Pupil referral unit absence

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in 2016/17 was 33.9 per cent, compared to 32.6 per cent in 2015/16. The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who were persistent absentees was 73.9 per cent in 2016/17, compared to 72.5 per cent in 2015/16.

8. Pupil absence by local authority

There is variation in overall and persistent absence rates across state-funded primary, secondary and special schools by region and local authority. Similarly to last year, the three regions with the highest overall absence rate across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools are the North East (4.9 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (4.9 per cent) and the South West (4.8 per cent), with Inner and Outer London having the lowest overall absence rate (4.4 per cent). The region with the highest persistent absence rate is Yorkshire and the Humber, where 11.9 per cent of pupil enrolments are persistent absentees, with Outer London having the lowest rate of persistent absence (at 10.0 per cent).

Absence information at local authority district level is also published within this release, in the accompanying underlying data files.

9. Background: Additional information and updates

This SFR is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The accompanying file includes a metadata document which provides further information on the contents of these files. This data is released under the terms of the "[Open Government License] (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>)" and is intended to meet at least 3 stars for "[Open Data] (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-government-transparency-and-accountability/2010-to-2015-government-policy-government-transparency-and-accountability#appendix-3-releasing-data-in-open-and-anonymised-formats>)".

10. Accompanying tables

The following are available in Excel format:

Charts

- Figure 1 Overall absence rates by type of school
Figure 2 Percentage of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees

National tables

- Table 1.1 Pupil absence by type of school
Table 1.2 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
Table 2.1 Pupil absence by reason and gender
Table 2.2 Pupil enrolments with one or more session of absence by reason
Table 2.3 Pupil absence by reason for persistent absentees
Table 3.1 Distribution of enrolments by length of overall absence
Table 3.2 Percentage of enrolments by their overall absence rates
Table 4 Number of schools by the percentage of persistent absentees
Table 5.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
Table 5.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees
Table 5.3 Pupil absence by ethnic group
Table 5.4 Pupil enrolments that are persistent absentees by ethnic group
Table 5.5 Pupil absence by type of special educational need
Table 6 Pupil absence by Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) decile
Table 7 Pupil absence for four year olds
Table 8 Pupil absence, persistent absence and pupil absence by reason for pupil referral units

Local authority table

- Table 9 Pupil absence by type of school

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

We preserve confidentiality	The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the Department for Education protect confidentiality.
We round numbers	Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed to protect confidentiality. Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the Departmental statistical policy.
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	Symbols are used in the tables as follows: 0 zero x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality . not applicable .. not available

Additional information

This release is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The underlying data file includes a metadata document which provides further information on the contents of these files. This data is released under the terms of the [Open Government License](#) and is intended to meet at least 3 stars for [Open Data](#).

11. Further information is available

For recent pupil absence statistics visit: [Statistics: pupil absence](#)

The School Census only collects absence information from schools in England. For information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, contact the departments below or access their statistics at the following links:

Wales: school.stats@wales.gov.uk or [Welsh Government Statistics and Research](#)

Scotland: school.stats@scotland.gov.uk or [Scottish Government School Education Statistics](#)

Northern Ireland: statistics@deni.gov.uk or [Department of Education Education Statistics](#)

12. Revisions?

There are no further planned revisions to this Statistical First Release. However, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the [Departmental revisions policy](#).

13. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

14. Technical information

These statistics are presented as emerging findings and have been released to help planning, to study trends and to monitor outcomes of initiatives and interventions on pupil attendance. A [guide to absence statistics](#), which provides historical information on absence statistics, technical background information on the figures and data collection, and definitions of key terms should be referred to alongside this release.

The following technical notes are specific to this publication.

- Data are collected a term in arrears, meaning that where a school closes, data are not collected for the last term the school was open. For schools which close at the end of a term, data for that term will not be collected.
- 31 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the year and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be related to both the academy and the predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis.
- Year on year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.
- Schools with fewer than 6 enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 8 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

15. Get in touch

Media enquiries

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Other enquiries/feedback

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